



IDAHO FISH AND GAME GOLDSHEET

May 2026 Commission Meeting

Agenda Item: 2026 – 2027 Migratory Game Bird Season-
Setting (**Action**)

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Position/Title: Program Coordinator – Upland Game & Migratory Game Birds

Agenda Item No.: 5D
Supervisor Approval: SR

Background:

Idaho's waterfowl seasons are set within frameworks established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) after they consult with all state fish and wildlife agencies. Regulatory decisions are made using biological data observed the previous year. This process and schedule mean season frameworks (e.g., outside dates, season lengths, bag limits) are finalized early enough for state agencies to select and publish season dates in advance of fall seasons. Furthermore, this process allows the Commission to set seasons for all migratory game birds at the same time.

The Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) process determines the general duck season framework. This process was adopted by the USFWS in 1996 and is annually used to evaluate duck habitat and populations. The AHM process informs the optimal season framework for U.S. duck seasons. Special harvest strategies are used for some of the less common ducks (i.e., scaup, northern pintail). Goose seasons are determined by flyway management plans for each goose population. Adaptive Harvest Management decision frameworks were developed based on the observed 2025 breeding population size and the regulatory alternatives selected for the 2025–2026 hunting seasons to inform the 2026–2027 duck hunting regulations.

Based on the liberal regulatory alternative selected for the 2025–2026 hunting season and an observed 2025 breeding population size of 890,000 mallards (390,000 mallards observed in Alaska and 500,000 observed in the southern Pacific Flyway) the optimal choice for the 2026–2027 hunting season in the Pacific Flyway is the liberal regulatory alternative: a 107-day season for all waterfowl, except scaup (86 days). This framework is designed to allow the maximum number of hunting days and bag limits without long-term impact to Idaho's waterfowl resource.

The federal framework for ducks and dark geese was expanded in 2019 to January 31. The federal framework for light geese (snow [including blue] and Ross's) was expanded in 2008 to March 10 for interior states within the Pacific Flyway. Idaho has implemented late-winter seasons since 2010.

In 2013, the federal framework for white-fronted geese was separated from Canada geese and expanded to March 10 within the Pacific Flyway. Idaho has implemented a late-winter season for white-fronted geese since 2014.



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In 2024, the federal framework for Canada geese was expanded to February 15.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code 36-104(2) grants authority to the Commission to determine when an open season may be declared for the taking of wildlife. IDAPA 13.01.09.301 establishes rules regarding the take of migratory game birds.

Idaho's migratory game bird seasons are set within a framework established by the USFWS after meeting with all state fish and wildlife agencies.

Public Involvement Process:

In 2024, the Department conducted a web-based goose hunter opinion survey to obtain input from goose hunters on how to structure goose seasons and zones. This information is intended to guide Idaho goose seasons for the 2025–2029 seasons. There were over 6,300 respondents to the 2024 goose survey.

In 2025, the Department conducted a web-based duck hunter opinion survey to obtain input from duck hunters on how to structure duck seasons and zones. This information is intended to guide Idaho duck seasons for the 2026–2030 seasons, rather than re-defining seasons each year. There were over 7,300 respondents to the 2025 duck survey.

The 2026–2027 migratory game bird season proposals were available for public comment on the Department's website from February 27–March 15, and open houses were held in most regions. Staff will provide a summary of public comments on proposals during the meeting.

Justification:

Commission action is required to set migratory game bird seasons for 2026–2027.

Staff Recommendation:

The Department recommends implementing the maximum number of hunting days and bag limits allowed by federal frameworks, as outlined in the following proposed daily bag and possession limits, by species.

- Possession limit for the following species is 3 times the listed daily bag limits:
 - 7 ducks and mergansers in aggregate, with not more than 2 female mallards, 2 scaup, 2 redheads, 3 pintail, and 2 canvasbacks
 - 8 snipe
 - 25 coots
 - 5 Canada geese
 - 10 white-fronted geese
 - 20 light geese (snow [including blue] geese and Ross's geese) in aggregate
 - 15 mourning and white-winged doves in aggregate



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- Swan – daily and season limit of 1 swan
- Sandhill crane – daily and season limit of 2 cranes
- American crow – no daily bag or possession limit

Staff recommendations on season dates, zone configurations, and tag numbers are presented in the following pages and will be presented at the Commission meeting.

Suggested Motion:

I move the Commission adopt staff recommendations for the 2026–2027 migratory game bird seasons as presented.



Migratory Game Bird Recommendations
(Changes from 2025–2026 seasons **highlighted**)

2026–2027 Migratory Game Bird Season-setting

Recommendations for the 2026–2027 seasons are found on the following pages. Changes from the 2025–2026 seasons are highlighted. Comments are summarized by proposal.

Ducks (including mergansers), snipe, and coots

Season proposals were based on results from the 2025 duck hunter opinion survey. There were 91 online comments on duck season proposals. General themes included support for proposals, dissatisfaction with concurrent youth/veteran hunting days, desire for later or split seasons (in response to mild winters), changes to zone boundaries, limiting/excluding nonresident participation, and lower bag limits due to concern about duck populations.

Youth Waterfowl Season

Proposed season structure:
Statewide: September 26-27

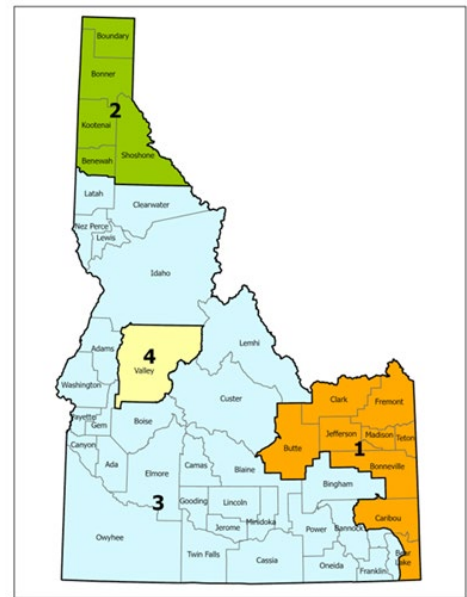
Proposed season structure:

Zone 1: October 3, 2026 – January 15, 2027; Scaup:
October 3, 2026 – December 27, 2026

Zone 2: October 10, 2026 – January 22, 2027; Scaup:
October 29, 2026 – January 22, 2027

Zone 3: October 19, 2026 – January 31, 2027; Scaup:
November 7, 2026 – January 31, 2027

Zone 4: October 3, 2026 – January 15, 2027; Scaup:
October 3, 2026 – December 27, 2026



Proposed daily bag limit is 7 ducks and mergansers in aggregate; no more than 2 female mallards, 2 redheads, 2 scaup, 3 pintail and 2 canvasbacks; 8 snipe; and 25 coots.

Possession limit: three times the daily bag limit.



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Canada geese

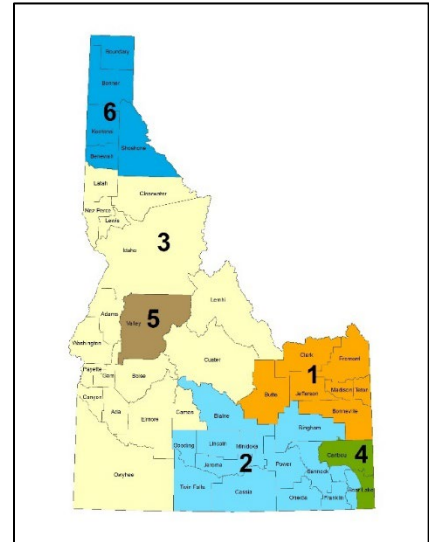
Season proposals were based on results from the 2024 goose hunter opinion survey; current season structures were scoped for all zones. There were 70 online comments on Canada goose season proposals. General themes included general support, season alignment with duck seasons, and changes to zone boundaries.

Proposed season structure:

- Zone 1: October 3, 2026 – January 15, 2027
- Zone 2: November 3, 2026 – February 15, 2027
- Zone 3: October 19, 2026 – January 31, 2027
- Zone 4: September 1, 2026 – September 15, 2026 & October 3, 2026 – December 31, 2026
- Zone 5: October 3, 2026 – January 15, 2027
- Zone 6: November 3, 2026 – February 15, 2027

Proposed daily bag limit is 5 Canada geese.

Possession limit: three times the daily bag limit.



Light Geese: Snow (including blue) geese and Ross's geese

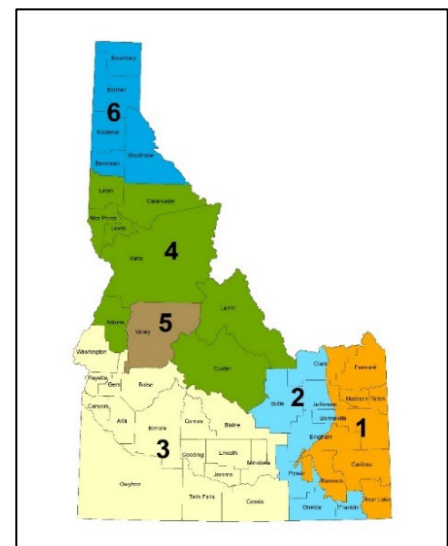
Season proposals were based on results from the 2024 goose hunter opinion survey; current season structures were scoped for all zones. There were 23 online comments on light goose season proposals. The most common themes were to remove the split season in Zone 3, general support, concurrent season with white-fronted geese, and a Conservation Order season.

Proposed season structure:

- Zone 1: October 3, 2026 – January 15, 2027
- Zone 2: October 3, 2026 – December 23, 2026 & February 16, 2027 – March 10, 2027
- Zone 3: October 19, 2026 – December 24, 2026 & February 1, 2027 – March 10, 2027
- Zone 4: October 19, 2026 – January 31, 2027
- Zone 5: October 3, 2026 – January 15, 2027
- Zone 6:** October 10, 2026 – January 22, 2027

Proposed daily bag limit is 20 light geese.

Possession limit: three times the daily bag limit.





White-fronted geese

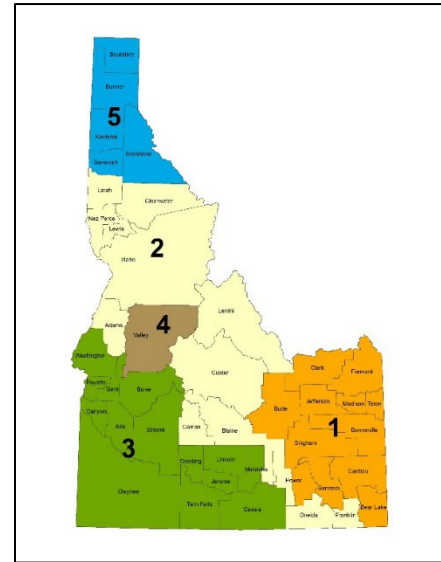
Season proposals were based on results from the 2024 goose hunter opinion survey; current season structures were scoped for all zones. There were 20 online comments on white-fronted goose season proposals. The most common theme was for later seasons.

Proposed season structure:

- Zone 1: October 3, 2026 – January 15, 2027
- Zone 2: October 19, 2026 – January 31, 2027
- Zone 3: November 3, 2026 – February 15, 2027
- Zone 4: October 3, 2026 – January 15, 2027
- Zone 5:** October 10, 2026 – January 22, 2027

Proposed daily bag limit is 10 white-fronted geese.

Possession limit: three times the daily bag limit.



Swans

Current season structure was scoped. There were 15 online comments on the swan season proposal. Common themes included hunt area expansion, a later season, general support, and a waiting period for successful applicants.

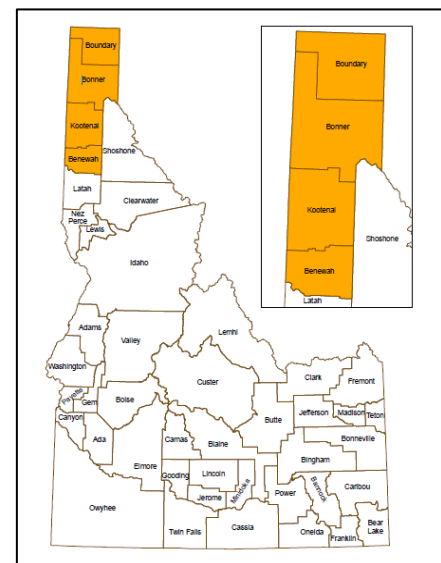
The proposed season structure for swans is:

Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, and Kootenai counties:

October 10, 2026 – December 1, 2026

All tags (50) will be offered through a Controlled Hunt application process.

Proposed daily/season bag limit is 1 swan.





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Mourning and White-winged Doves

Current season structure was scoped. There were 10 online comments on the dove season proposal. Common themes included Comments included general support and an earlier season.

Proposed statewide firearm season structure:

September 1, 2026 – October 30, 2026

Proposed daily bag limit: 15 mourning and white-winged doves in the aggregate.

Proposed statewide extended falconry season structure:

January 23, 2027 – March 10, 2027

Possession limit: three times the daily bag limit.

American Crow

Current season structure was scoped. There were 4 online comments on the crow season proposal. Common themes were general support and longer seasons.

American crow seasons are set by states following guidance provided for in the Federal Register (i.e., 50 CFR 20.133). The season shall not exceed 124 days during a calendar year and shall not be permitted during the peak crow nesting period within a State.

The proposed statewide season structure for American crows is:

October 27, 2026 – February 28, 2027

Proposed daily bag limit: no limit.



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Sandhill Cranes

More liberal season structures were scoped. There were 12 online comments on sandhill crane season proposals. Common themes included general support, expansion of hunt areas to other parts of the state, and opposition to the increase in tag allocation.

The Pacific and Central Flyway Management Plan for Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) sandhill cranes allows for the regulated harvest of cranes when the population exceeds 15,000, as estimated by the average of the three most recent reliable surveys. Based on the allowable harvest for this population, 4,250 sandhill cranes may be harvested from the RMP during the 2026 hunting season.

Idaho’s 2026 crane harvest allocation, as provided by the Flyway Management Plan, is 473 cranes, up from 324 in 2025. Staff reference harvest rates observed in previous years to determine the number of tags available for each hunt area.

The Department proposes the following actions:

All tags (870) will be offered on a first-come first-served basis at any vendor as per the allocation below. This is a 155-tag increase from 2025.

Hunt Area	Season	Tags
1 - Bear Lake	9/1-9/30	370 300
1 - Bear Lake	10/1-10/30	150
2 - Teton	9/1-9/15	61 40
2 - Teton	10/1-10/30	40
3 - Fremont	9/1-9/15	51 40
3 - Fremont	9/16-9/30	51 40
3 - Fremont	10/1-10/30	30
4 - Jefferson	9/1-9/15	34 30
4 - Jefferson	9/16-9/30	34 30
4 - Jefferson	10/1-10/30	30
5 - Swan Lake	9/1-9/30	57 50
5 - Swan Lake	10/1-10/30	20
6 - Malad	9/1-9/30	57 50
6 - Malad	10/1-10/30	20

The daily limit is 2 cranes for all hunts. The season limit is 2 cranes.